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SOUTHERN AIR DELIVERY TO ISRAEL SURFACES

By NEIL ROLAND
WASHINGTON

An air freight firm once owned by the CIA made an unusual delivery of 180 tons of cargo from Kelly Air Force base in Texas to Tel Aviv at the same time earlier this year that U.S. arms were shipped through Israel to Iran, records revealed Wednesday.

An Air Force spokesman said he could not determine the cargo of the flight because the flight contract had not been administered by the Pentagon.

"I'm puzzled as to how it left Kelly," said Paul Reynolds of the Air Force's Military Airlift Command. "We do all Defense Department contracting. You can draw your own conclusions."

X Southern Air Transport Inc., which also has delivered military supplies to Central America for the State and Defense departments, made four flights from the Texas air base in February and May, Transportation Department records show.

Administration officials have said that arms transfers to Iran were made via Israel during those months.

Southern Air, a Miami-based firm owned by the CIA from 1960 to 1973, also shipped five loads of U.S. Army aircraft parts and field radios to El Salvador in October, soon after a plane it had serviced was downed ferrying arms from El Salvador to Nicaraguan rebels.

Army supplies of between 115 and 175 tons were sent from Charleston, S.C., Air Force base to the Salvadoran military at Ilopango Airport in San Salvador between Oct. 6 and 28 under a foreign military assistance program, an Army spokesman said.

The Salvadoran military has been accused of allowing its facilities at Ilopango to be used as a springboard for arms shipments to the Contra rebels fighting to overthrow the Marxist-led Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Maj. Phil Soucy, an Army spokesman, said he was unaware of any supplies forwarded to the Contras by the El Salvadoran military, which has denied aiding the Contras.

He said it was "strictly coincidence" that the Southern Air deliveries were made to El Salvador on the heels of the crash of the cargo plane that took off from El Salvador.

Southern Air was paid \$500,000 by an unidentified agency to repair and maintain the C123 plane downed in Nicaragua Oct. 5, a Southern Air spokesman said. Two Americans on board were killed and a third, Eugene Hasenfus, was captured and sent to prison by the Managua government.

Two Southern Air flights on Boeing 707s carried 90 tons of cargo to Tel Aviv in February and two flights shipped 90 tons in May, Transportation Department records show.

House Democratic leader Jim Wright of Texas said last week that 1,000 Army TOW anti-tank missiles had been shipped from San Antonio, Texas, to Iran.

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A State Department spokesman said, "We don't have any information about the flights and we have no way of getting any."

William Kress, a spokesman for Southern Air, declined comment on the flights. Southern Air made five deliveries of non-lethal aid to the Contras for the State Department in early 1986, Kress said.

It also delivered 225 tons of unidentified cargo to Havana, Cuba, for the State Department in 1985 and 1986, according to Kress and Transportation Department records.

The amount of cargo on two of the flights -- 45 tons and 46 tons - exceeded the size of normal State Department deliveries of mail and household goods to the U.S. interests section in Havana, a department spokesman said.

"It doesn't make sense it would weigh 45 tons," said the spokesman, who asked not to be identified.

Southern Air, owned by James Bastian, expects to earn \$100 million in fiscal year 1987, a sharp increase from its projected earnings of \$45 million in 1986, Kress said.

The company is expected to receive \$43.7 million from the Air Force in 1987, up from \$13.0 million in 1986, an Air Force spokesman said.